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ONE YEAR'S EXPERIENCE WITH MANUSCRIPT WORK.

THIS paper deals mainly with the problem of English in our city-school system and is not a treatise on rhetoric or rhetorical art. It is a matter of concern that the ability to speak and write readily and intelligently is so lamentably wanting in the children under our care. To investigate the causes of halting inaccurate speech and to discover remedies, is the need. From this side of the question I have approached the subject. All technical points of style, such as clearness, force, and elegance; unity, mass, and coherence, I have left untouched; they have been adequately dealt with by Professors Barrett Wendell, Adam Hill, Carpenter, Scott, Denny, Bates and others. The art of construction, it seems to me, is the most difficult and the most important part of the English work for the pupil to grasp. Expression is acquired unconsciously and after many days, and there are a thousand influences that mold that expression.

The one year's trial of manuscript work has brought forth interesting results. It has confirmed the widely prevalent opinion that the demand for more frequent and systematic written expression was a legitimate one. The main hindrance to the excellence of the written high-school English for many years has been plainly felt to be, not ignorance of what to do, but inability to accomplish through lack of an adequate teaching force. Year after year go up to the colleges the ranks of boys and girls from our schools, public and private, and year after year come back complaints that the preparatory work in English is unsatisfactorily done—with this mortifying discrimination that the work of the private schools approximates far more nearly the standard than that done by the public schools.

The reason for this state of things is not far to seek. The overworked high-school teacher, with her seven classes of English, ranging from thirty to sixty pupils, finds it a physical impossibility to do justice to all sides of her work. She may stimulate her class and rouse it to enthusiasm over the several masterpieces of literature set to be read during the year; with the untiring assistance of the elocution teacher, a fairly sympathetic rendering of these same masterpieces may be secured from the conscientious or the bright pupils; her classes may be

able to answer every footnote, and to discuss intelligently the reading matter for the day; but when after all this energy has been put forth during school hours, and she returns home to the ever-mounting pile of composition papers from those seven classes of forty to sixty pupils, human nature is prostrate and, in the French phrase, "can no more."

Yet, that the need of the pupil for regular and systematic training in the written expression of his mother-tongue is imperative, no one feels more keenly than the conscientious English teacher. The only possible excuse for that teacher who confides the weekly grind of compositions to the waste-basket, without looking at them, is the indignant protest of human endurance. Since the writing must be done, and done under careful correction, the manuscript teacher, so called, has come into being—or rather, as it has once been well put, "The old-time brilliant lecturer on *belles lettres* has given place to a battalion of industrious theme-readers."

The faults of the average high-school pupil fall into two classes, of which those in the first class are far more serious and deep-rooted—faults of thinking and faults of expression. If we could teach the child to think clearly, we should go far to improve the quality of his written English. The great lack to be seen in reading over many themes is not the paucity of ideas, but the want of relationship of ideas in their co-ordination and subordination. The connectives, and conjunctive parts of speech in his work, are conspicuous by their absence. A clause which should be subordinate to the main clause, the groping child makes co-ordinate, or entirely independent. "But" is his favorite introduction of a contradictory or a modifying thought? Faithful "but" is on hand even when there is no contradiction whatsoever. The introduction of the conjunction "that," after a verb of saying, is a nicety, in the use of which the Latin teacher can drill him, in translating the long dispatches from Cæsar. Because of the deficient sense of delicate dependencies in thought and language, the teacher struggles long and valiantly against the independent English construction. Its persistent use by the high-school child is apparently due to the drill in the Latin ablative absolute

which he is getting at the same time. For example, "The train having started, the child cried out." It is a long fight to convince the pupil that a causal clause or a time clause is a better substitute for the ambiguous, awkward independent construction or English ablative absolute.

The same lack of close reasoning leads to another *casus belli* between teacher and struggling composer—the omission and the confusion of pronominal antecedents; and an animated discussion arises as to why "every child lost their hat" is not permissible.

The change in point of view is a frequent pitfall for the unwary scribe who, when he comes to reread his sentence or paragraph, finds that he has begun it in one person and wandered into another or perhaps a third person before he has made a laborious end.

The inability to think out an action clearly betrays the pupil into the misuse of the verb. He has great trouble with the preterits and pluperfect tenses, and actions stand to the front of the stage which should be thrown into the background, thus: "Jim sprinkled the grass before he milked the cows," for, "Jim had sprinkled the grass before he milked the cows." These two statements mean one and the same thing to the child; the relativity of actions is utterly lost upon him.

In grappling with the verb, the teacher meets one difficulty in the nomenclature of tenses. Is it not possible in the grades to teach the child the proper names of present, past, perfect, pluperfect, and future? This would simplify matters much, both for the Latin and for the English teachers. As it is, the child comes up equipped with the bewildering present, present perfect, past, past perfect, future, future perfect, and must learn the new names and their application from his high-school teachers.

Owing to this weakness of reasoning power, the teacher must lend her aid by supplying helpful material for the composition, and talking over all the bearings of the subject. This discussion of the material and plan of the composition is a very important feature, and does much to strengthen the thought-power of the pupil. He becomes filled with his subject, and out of the abund-

ance writes a better paper than he would with the *bare title* presented to him.

The presentation of the paragraph, as a unit of composition, rather than the sentence, is an efficient instrument in the hands of a keen teacher, to assist the weak constructive power of the pupil. The paragraph may be made a means of teaching logical thinking—in my opinion it is the most effective means at hand. The child grows and gathers strength when he passes from the consideration of the single paragraph, coherent, whole, complete in itself, with its many capacities of narration, description, comparison, enumeration and summary, to the paragraph in its relation to the long composition, one little unit within the greater unit.

How delightedly he discusses the first long composition, and fits together the various segments of the whole, shifting and arranging his outline of paragraphs according as exigency demands. Here a real live interest in the subject wakes up, and the constructive and synthetic forces are at work. Here the logical faculty has the greatest play in perceiving sequence and relationship, and the long, slow preparatory work to this end is bearing fruit to the patient teacher in the bright eyes and quick suggestions on all sides, as the subject and its bearings are explored. The outlining, or planning of a composition, is richer in pedagogical interest, and in direct practical bearing on the child's development, than any other part of the work. The repetition of this exercise strengthens and invigorates him; he feels the exhilaration of the creator, the joy of the making. In all this there is the direct contact of teacher and pupil, the sympathetic contact of co-workers in this same quarry.

The outline finished, the actual execution of the work is taken up. In the consideration of the expression, great differences of home environment divide the pupils of the same class from each other. Van Rensselaer, fresh from his boyish browsings in a fine old library, and an intelligent listening to the table-talk of cultured parents, drives his pen easily and gracefully through long and short periods, while patient Isaacs struggles with foreign idioms and all the difficulties of this grammarless, uninflected

language of ours, and fiery little Rafferty dashes headlong, larding his themes with inaccuracies and hibernianisms. The inequality of it all presses upon the English teacher.

In considering faults of expression in the Ohio schools, there are two points to be noted—the immense foreign element among us, and the general flatness and staleness of our westernisms, piquant though some may contend that they are. In Cincinnati the large foreign population has laid an additional burden on the English teacher, and foreign idioms and constructions are unconsciously caught and used by American-born children.

One of the most obnoxious and persistent of these solecisms is the wrong use of the auxiliaries *would* and *would have*, thus: "If he would have driven by, I would have seen him," for, "If he had driven by, I should have seen him." Another is: "Mary, your mother said you should come to supper;" still another: "He made me to write my lesson." Such school vulgarisms as, "The teacher left me do it," are hard to eradicate. These are only a few of the solecisms which a teacher meets with. For the foreign-born child or for him with foreign parents, only persistent correction and careful attention to speech can overcome these vicious habits. For all the children, foreign and American, there should be co-operation among the members of the school faculty for the suppression of bad English, and a spirit of watchfulness over each other's slips of tongue inculcated in the children themselves.

It is to be deplored that as a community we are so inaccurate in our daily speech. On all sides we hear such expressions as "those kind," "that far," "different than," "he don't," "step in a car," "climb on a platform," "acting like she does." Until their elders look more carefully to their words we cannot expect accuracy from the children.

To counteract the effect of this slipshod English, and the inveterate tendency to abbreviation, and exceedingly bad spelling, demand the reproduction of a spirited bit of fine English from time to time—a description from Irving, Hawthorne, or Poe, the characterization of Queen Elizabeth in Green's *Short History of the English People*, or several paragraphs from Macau-

lay's *Lord Clive*. We have Robert Louis Stevenson's own testimony, delightfully given, of the effectiveness of this way of cultivating an individual style by studies in the pages of others.

That familiarity with a good style has a salutary influence on composition I know from my experience with a class who were studying Myers's *Greek History*. Suddenly called upon to write an account of the battle of Marathon, they produced papers which rose to the occasion and told the story in a tone perceptibly more easy and elegant than that discernible in any papers handed in before.

Imitation must be the endeavor of the tyro before original creation—if such a thing exist. The school courses are not barren of good prose authors, but they are not so complete as the composition teacher might desire. Irving we have, but Hawthorne, Poe, and Macaulay are lacking in the first two years. The last named author is an inspiration in his almost perfect paragraph structure. For the plain narration of plain facts, no writing, in my estimation, is so helpful to the young as that of Defoe. The glory of the eighteenth century was its prose—plain, closely reasoned, elegant in simplicity; and of its authors, Defoe or Goldsmith are the most suitable to put before the pupil. Defoe will teach the child how to handle his thoughts and subordinate ideas one to another. If he wants examples of narration, description, exposition, argumentation, he will find excellent models of these in *Robinson Crusoe*, couched in the severely plain English of Defoe—a far safer style than the affectation of Addison or the inaccuracy of Steele.

This consideration brings me to the relation of the child's reading to his composition work. That it has a definite relation no one can deny, but too often an indiscriminate reading is encouraged, and the habit of devouring milk-and-water fiction is fostered. This is especially true of the children attending the city schools, some of whom take out a book a day from the city library.

A case came under my notice last year of a child who had great difficulty in her composition work. In despair she turned to me for assistance. I questioned her about her reading, which

I undertook to guide. After a year of supervision in slow, careful reading of stories, whose literary excellence was unquestioned, Mary came to be able to express herself much more fluently and more gracefully than she did at the beginning of the term.

Present-day pedagogics assigns it to the province of the manuscript teacher, not only to direct the manner of expression of ideas, but to provide the material or ideas to be expressed. This she must be able to do, either *per se*, or by directing the child's attention to the sources in books or in his own experience. Children are quick to imitate the example of their elders, and it is a pity that their young eagerness should feed upon the rank output of novels of the hour, whose moral and literary qualities leave so much to be desired. *The Gadfly* is not the most edifying and faithful representation of life which should keep a young girl up to the wee small hours of the night, because, as she confided to me, she knew very little about religion, and was anxious to learn more of it from this book. My yearly investigations into the favorite books of high-school boys and girls bring forth a thoughtful mood, while I reflect upon the responsibilities which lie upon some of us grown-ups toward the children. Careful attention to the outside reading of the pupils under her charge is the pleasantest and most influential part of the conscientious teacher's work.

For effective work in English to be accomplished in our schools, it is desirable that a closer relationship or association exist between the English teachers of all grades, especially between the manuscript teachers of the lower schools and those in the high schools. The daily theme-work in the grades is the more imperative because of a temper of mind which is growing up in the children. By this attitude of mind I mean the tendency to look upon all relationship with the teacher as a question-and-answer relationship. Inert, the child stands like a slot machine, till the rattle of the coin or question wakes up an automatic turning of the cogs of the mind. There is little initiative, but this quality can be cultivated by the written English of the lower grades.

One of the most salutary lessons I ever learned was the telling of the stories of Alfred the Great, Edmund Ironsides, the Great Charter, and other details of English history for a particular class. Question and answer were not tolerated in that teacher's lesson, and the student knew in study hour that he would be called on the next day to give a coherent story of the Saxon kingdom—to give it independently without any helpful suggestions. Each story I talked out to myself over and over. Then I secured an obliging listener and told the tale over again till I could tell it fluently and confidently. Had I been required to write it afterward, I doubt not the narration would have given evidence of former practice. The incident of this class work may serve as a hint of the very vital and close relation lying between the elocution teacher and the manuscript teacher and the history teacher.

The manuscript teacher, as well as the classical teacher, may demand carefully written English translations of Greek and Latin authors to be done under her eye. Practice of this sort will lend an added dignity in the pupil's eyes to the high work of interpreting or rendering thought from one noble medium into another.

These kinds of exercises in the lower schools will create a healthful spirit of initiative, and will assist the daily theme-work there, and will vindicate the establishment of special English work in our schools.

A manuscript teacher of whatever grade should have the time for painstaking correction of the papers submitted to her, and should oversee the careful revision of each paper in class. To write and revise under direction is the only royal road to excellence in expression.

The filing away of the original and the corrected manuscript, for the term at least, impresses the pupil with the seriousness of his work, and gives opportunity for the review of the progress made during the year. The reviews should take place in private conferences with the pupil, when suggestions and kindly criticism can be made, for which class teaching gives little time.

To summarize the result of the year's work. It has brought

forth and emphasized the division of the English work into *general* and *manuscript* departments; it has shown the faults of the beginner to be, first, inability to think logically, as proved by the lack of conjunctions and proper connectives, unnecessary changes in point of view, confusion and omission of the antecedent, misuse of the verb, and inability to construct independently a coherent, long composition; second, a lack of power of expression, due largely to home environments, foreign, illiterate, and cheaply common. It has emphasized the need of co-operation of all the grades in the English work, the need of developing a spirit of initiative in the child, its more frequent practice in expression, correction, revision, and the filing away of work done. Above all it has revealed the barren spiritual condition of the child growing up among us, starving amidst an abundance, when a proper fostering care and sympathetic supervision of his intellectual recreation would open to him the gates into that far, goodly country of joy and beauty, where he might feast or wander at will in that blessed "light that never was on sea or land — the consecration and the poet's dream."

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